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THE PEARL

# THE PEARL *Miller 1907*

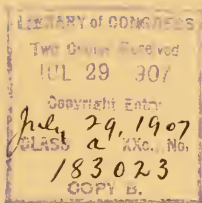
AN ANONYMOUS ENGLISH POEM  
OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

RENDERED IN PROSE BY  
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1907

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B. M. 19 Mar. 7. 4

Her gracious beauty, from our sight  
Transported far, on high is beaming now  
With spiritual radiance so divine,  
That all the heaven doth shine  
With love's own light, to which the angels bow,  
Wondering with their calm eyes profound and clear,  
To see such gentle grace sprung from our mortal sphere.

— DANTE, *New Life*,  
Translated by Theodore Martin.

## PREFACE

IN preparing this version of the *Pearl*, I have tried to save as much as I could of the original, both in letter and in spirit, in detail and in larger effect, avoiding as much as possible an affectation of false quaintness that often mars the interpretation of such a text. The music of the poem — almost its finest charm — cannot awaken even a faint echo in a tongue whose pitch and quality have been so altered by time. Yet its melody may in some measure be reproduced by any one who will take the trouble of a little practice in reading the Middle English aloud.

In text and interpretation my edition of the poem has been the basis of this rendering. The design on the cover is adapted from illuminated letters in the unique manuscript at the British Museum, photographic

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reproductions of which may be seen in the university libraries at Princeton and Yale.

To my friend and colleague, Professor John Duncan Spaeth, I am indebted for a minute examination of my rendering; his good taste and scholarship have given invaluable help in the task of revision. Professor Lane Cooper has very kindly read the proof.

C. G. O., JR.

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY,  
March 19, 1907.



## INTRODUCTION

THE *Pearl*, whatever its faults, is full of beauty in form and spirit. At first reading, the course of the poem is likely to seem interrupted with dull digressions, out of proportion to the rest. But, if it is viewed as a whole, its various parts sink into a right and helpful relation to each other. First, there sounds prophetically, but faintly, the note of peace and triumph which later brings the poem to its final cadence. Then begins the prelude, wherein is shown the agonizing conflict of grief and doubt that raged in the poet's heart after the loss of his Pearl. Through the deep sleep that at length comes to his exhausted body and soul the poem issues into the first of its three great phases.

The poet is almost dazed with the brightness of the strange land in which he awakes;

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gradually his mind begins to comprehend its surroundings, and he starts to range among the endless beauties of the place; more and more eagerly he goes forward, until at the shining brink of Paradise he pauses, straining his heart after the joys of the fairer land beyond. And here, without warning, his eyes fall upon his Pearl in all the bright glory of the heavenly life, yet sweet and maidenly in her graciousness towards him. A moment of humbled embarrassment, then of ecstatic joy, and he thinks: 'Here is the solution of all my troubles; there is nothing left to dread, and everything to enjoy in this dearest of all companionships.' And he cries aloud to her in anticipation.

But tenderly and gravely she rebukes him; such delights go not with his condition of sin and mortality. At once the old war in his soul springs up with new fury. 'God is

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unfair. There is nothing but misery in the world for me and all men. I cannot endure it!' Then more like a mother than a child, mingling transcendent pity with sternness, as did Beatrice when she melted the soul of her lover to contrition and obedience, the Pearl shows this sorrow-broken man how his trouble may become not an instrument of self-destruction, such as he is making it, but the very voice of God, quieting his soul, and revealing to him the vision of endless peace.

'And what,' he asks, 'is the nature of that peace which she has found?' First, she explains, it lies in the acceptance of God's way as not only inevitable, but kindest and best. Second, in unfailing gratitude for his goodness as a friend. Third, in utter freedom from the spirit of selfish competition, that we may enjoy pure delight in the

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happiness of our fellows. But all this is incomprehensible to one whose emotional experiences have been self-centred, and whose habit of mind, owing to his scholastic training, has been, after the manner of his times, formal and rationalistic. The maiden at first, therefore, concedes somewhat to his demand for logical proof; but with every point and sentence she mingles suggestions of feeling and rightness of heart, which slowly and subtly convince him, as he listens to her description of the blessed life. Less and less resistant, and more and more eager his questions become, until, at last, the need of question, and proof, and sympathy, is done away, and he is ready to behold with his own eyes the Beatific Vision.

In the glory that then bursts upon his sight he hardly misses his Pearl, who has now withdrawn from him. Before him un-

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fold in order the splendors of the Heavenly City, surpassing in beauty and number the imagination of man, and beyond the power of his unaided sense to receive. Then, as in the earlier part of his dream all the joys of the Earthly Paradise were consummate in the visitation of the Pearl, so here through the higher glories of the Heavenly Paradise the poem rises to the apotheosis of the redeemed, of Christ the Lamb that was slain, and of his Bride rejoicing with perfect joy. Unutterable then the brightness, the purity, the adoration, the far-reaching sound of angels' song; ineffable the tenderness, the pity, the triumph of Christ himself; for ever happy and secure the Pearl in the fullness of eternal life. Beside himself with ecstasy, driven by one last selfish impulse, the poet forgets for an instant all that his visitant has taught him, and tries with hasty force to

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seize more than God has given him. A sudden shock of blindness and insensibility, and he gropes slowly back to his earthly life.

For a moment he finds himself in the midst of his old sorrow, but only for a moment. Through his experience of the vision he has been born into a new life of peace, and service, and patient looking-forward to the dear and unbroken companionship that awaits him in the life to come.

In many ways the *Pearl* is like one of the old churches of its time. The lines of its structure are simple, direct, and perceptible. Part is closely related to part; there is rise, climax, and fall; and all parts unite in the consistent setting-forth of a single idea and emotion.

But lest its structure be too apparent, its lines too severe, its unity too uncompromising, it is overgrown and softened with a pro-

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fusion of beauties in detail—leaves, flowers, fruit, birds, jewels, landscape, parables, pictures, and the splendors of the Apocalypse, wrought in living form and luminous color. Sometimes they are heaped up in excess, and threaten to hide the main purpose of the poem with their luxuriance; again they subside, and the mind is left free to contemplate the sublimer and more austere aspects of the theme.

Then one may pass beyond the immediate charm and emotion of the poem, and look far along receding vistas of the ages out of which it has grown. Its form is the form that these ages have elaborated with slow toil and experiment; its beauties are drawn from their rich and long-accumulated store; its thought was conceived and proved by their bitter struggle, its feeling enriched by their deep and manifold experience, its

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triumphant vision made real and glorified in the blood of martyrs and saints. Thus one is drawn back through light and shade, through arch after arch of time, each growing more dim and withdrawn, until all loses itself in the pure orient light from which it first came.

Nor is the *Pearl* without traits of harsh austerity. Stern and awful are the conceptions of God's justice and power that underlie the work. Besides, it opens shadowed recesses of a struggling soul, unpenetrated with light of heaven, and dismal with the echoes of a bootless plaint. Here and there, out of the gloom, grins the hideous face of some past sin, some nameless fear, of depression, loneliness, and despair. Then comes a stillness, and, after a space, there steals into this dark solitude the sound of sweet uplifted voices, as from a great distance. Then the



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mind is quieted, and led slowly out of itself into the light, groping and reaching forward, humbled, eager, raising itself higher and higher, to look at last with opened eyes upon the vision of sacrifice, and love, and purity of them that dwell in the Kingdom of Heaven.

## THE PEARL

**O** PEARL, delight of Christ the Prince;  
now safe, afar, in his clear regions of  
pure shining gold!

Truly no pearl of the Orient have I ever found her peer in price—so round and radiant and unchanging, so tender and slight of form. At all times when I have appraised bright gems, her I have set apart and alone. But alas, one day I lost her; in an arbor it was that she slipped from me, and fell through the grass into the ground; and now, as with a death-wound, I pine away in the thrall of longing for the spotless Pearl that was mine. Often, since there she sprang from my reach, I have lingered in that place, yearning for the happiness that erstwhile was wont to banish my troubles and exalt my blessed lot; her absence pierces my heart

continually, and makes my breast ever swell and burn in wretchedness.

But never seemed to me any song so sweet as that which, on a day, in a quiet season, came stealing upon me. Truly, one after another, sad feelings welled up in my heart, as I sat thinking of her bright color now clad in clay. O earth, thou marrest a lovely jewel — the Pearl that was spotless, and mine own!

Many a plant of spice must needs spring and spread its leaves where such riches have fallen to decay; flowers, yellow, and blue, and red, there turn their faces all bright and shining towards the sun; no flower or fruit can wither in that place, since my Pearl there sank into the dark of the mold. Each spear of grass springs from a lifeless seed, or else there were no wheat to be gathered into barns; of good ever each good cometh.

Surely then from so fair a seed sweet spices cannot fail to spring and grow—from that precious Pearl so pure.

Into this place of which I speak—this arbor green—I had gone one day, after my wont. It was a high season in August,<sup>1</sup> when corn is cut with sickles keen. There was a mound in the place where the Pearl had fallen and rolled away from me; upon it fell shadows of flowers bright and sheen—gilliflower, ginger, and gromwell, with peonies scattered all about. And if the sight was fair to behold, sweet too was the fragrance which rose thence, where dwells, as I think, that adorable one, my precious, spotless Pearl.

Before that place I wrung my hands in the clutches of freezing care. A sudden din

<sup>1</sup> Probably the feast of the Assumption on the fifteenth of the month.

of grief rose in my heart, though reason tried to make peace therein. Wild forebodings warred fiercely within my soul, and I wailed aloud for my Pearl that was fast imprisoned in that place: and, though Christ in his true compassion comforted me, yet my wretched will toiled on in woe. At last I fell upon the flowery turf, when suddenly such sweet fragrance entered and filled my brain that I sank into deep slumber, and dreamed of my precious Pearl so pure.

Thence sprang my soul aloft while my body lay at the grave-mound in dreams. For in God's grace my soul set forth on a strange journey to behold marvels. I knew not where in the world it was; I only saw that I was brought into a place where great cliffs stood cleaving together. Toward a forest I took my way, where were seen rocks of rich-

est hue. The light—the gleaming glory that flashed from them might no man believe; no fabric woven by men was ever half so bright and rare. All the hillsides thereabout were adorned with cliffs of clearest crystal, and among them were shining groves with boles as blue as inde. Like burnished silver were the shifting leaves, quivering unnumbered on every branch, as gleams fell upon them from the sky; with splendid shimmer all bright they shone. The gravel under foot was precious orient pearl. Ah, dim and dark are the very sun's beams beside all that splendor!

The glory of those fair hills made my spirit forget all its woe; so fresh were the odors from the fruits growing there that they fully satisfied me, as it had been sweet food. Birds of flaming colors, large and small, flew about in the woodland there; but

string of citole, or cithern-player, could ill counterfeit their lively notes, as with fluttering wings they sang together in sweet accord. Such joyous rapture could no man attain as to hear their lovely song, and see their bright array.

In like glory shone all that woodland whithersoever fortune led me; no man that beareth tongue is worthy to tell the glory thereof. I walked on and on with untroubled mind; no hillside was so steep and high as to threaten me with harm. The farther I went through this woodland, the fairer grew meadows and plants, spice-trees and pear-trees, hedges and borders of brooks, and bright rivers whose steep banks were as fine threads of gold.

At length I came to a stream which ran swiftly by its shore. Ah God, how rare its beauty! Those fair depths lay between ra-

diant banks of bright beryl, and, flowing sweetly, the water ran forth on its way with a murmuring sound as of many voices. At the bottom were glittering stones that shimmered and glowed like a flash of light through glass; they were as stars in streaming splendor that shine in the sky all a winter's night, while men lie fast asleep. For each pebble in those depths was either emerald, or sapphire, or other precious gem, so that the deep pools were all agleam of light, so rare was their beauty. The fair glory of hill and vale, of wood and water and sweet meadows, caused bliss to spring anew within me, and, quieting my grief, undid my anguish and healed my pain. Down along that stream, as it flowed on in its might, I sped in ecstasy that filled my mind brimful; and the farther I followed that watery vale, the mightier the joy that urged my heart. For



though fortune fareth whithersoever she will, whether she send solace or sorrow, yet the man to whom she inclines her favor strives hard to win more and more. Happier then my lot than I could ever tell, even in much space; for no mortal heart could hold a tenth part of the glad rapture of that place. Wherefore I thought Paradise lay over against those broad-sloping shores, and that the waters were but divisions between its pleasant places. Over the river, somewhere by hill or dale, must stand, I thought, that heavenly city. But the water was deep, and I dared not wade; yet ever the more I longed to behold it. Yes, more and more I yearned to see what lay beyond the stream; for if the place where I walked was fair, how much lovelier that farther shore! All about I stumbled and looked, and tried hard to find a fording-place, but the farther I went pick-

ing my way along the shore, the more the dangers there about me; and yet it seemed that I could not pause in dismay where joys were so alluring.

Then a strange thing befell me, that stirred my mind more deeply still. For greater wonder than ever seized me, as I saw beyond that pleasant stream a cliff of crystal all refulgent, that shot forth many a dazzling ray. At its base there sat a child, a gentle maiden full debonaire, in raiment all gleaming white. I knew her well, for I had seen her aforetime. Like glistening gold which men cut into fine threads, so shone that radiant one at the cliff's base. From my distance I gazed at her, and the longer I looked, the more came I to know her; and still as I searched her fair face, and scanned her lovely form, such transporting glory fell upon my sense as I had never known. A

glad desire to call her pursued me—but confusion dealt my heart a sudden blow; so strange it was to see her in that place, that my sense was stricken and wellnigh stunned at the sight.

Then lifted she her fair brow, her face white as smooth ivory, and it stung my heart with wild dismay ever deeper and deeper the longer I gazed. Great fear rose within me in spite of myself. I stood utterly still, and dared not cry out; with eyes wide open and mouth fast shut, I was as quiet as hawk in hall. I thought this apparition something spectral, and feared what might come of it—that she whom I there descried might escape before I could call aloud and stop her. Then she, the sweetly radiant, pure and unspotted, so soft, so slight, so fair and winsomely slender—that precious one all dight in pearls—arose in her royal

array. Pearls of kingly price might one then have seen by God's grace, when, fresh as a fleur-de-lis, she stepped forth down the shore. All gleaming white was her robe of fine linen, open at the sides, and purfled with the loveliest margery-pearls, as I guess, that I ever beheld; long were her sleeve-laps, I wot, and adorned round about with pearls in double border. Her kirtle showed beneath of the same bright stuff, all set about with precious pearls. A rich crown of margery-pearls unmingled with gems of any other kind this maiden wore; high-pinnacled it was, all of clear white pearls wrought in figures of flowers. No fillet nor braid she wore besides, but the folds of her hair fell loose about her. Sober and demure was her face—fit for duke or earl; her hue was paler than ivory. Her hair glistened like bright shorn gold, as it lay loose and light upon

her shoulders. Yet her color was deep, wanting not the adornment of the precious pearls in broidery all about. Every hem—at the wrists, the sides, and the openings—was edged and pointed with white pearls only, and all her vesture was lustrous white. One marvelous pearl without blemish was set secure in the midst of her breast; a man's mind would be sadly baffled ere he could measure the full beauty of that gem. No tongue, I think, could utter the sweet tale of that vision—so fair, so bright, so pure was the precious pearl there set.

All thus adorned in pearls that dear one beyond the stream came down the opposite shore. From here to Greece there was no happier man than I when she had reached the brink; nearer was she to me than aunt or niece, wherefore my joy was greater than ever. Then this peerless one made as if to

speak, for, bowing low in sweet womanly grace, she lightly caught off her crown of rich treasure, and blithely greeted me. Happy was I that was born to speak with that fair one in her array of pearls!

‘O Pearl, all dight in pearls,’ said I, ‘art thou mine own, my Pearl, that I have bewailed and mourned in night and solitude? Great yearning have I suffered for thee in secret since thou didst slip away from me into the grass. Gloomy, wasted, nigh spent with pain am I, while thou, unracked with strife, hast fallen upon a pleasant life in the home-land of Paradise. What fortune has brought my jewel hither, and cast me into grief and bondage? For, since we were separated and torn asunder, I have been but a wretched jeweler.’

Then that jewel, all arrayed in precious gems, lifted her face, raised to me her blue

eyes, set on again her crown of orient pearl, and at length said gravely: 'Sir, ill have you heeded your own words when you say that your Pearl is utterly lost, which is now so fair enclosed here in a coffer—I mean this garden bright and lovely—here to dwell for ever and make merry, where sin and mourning draw not nigh. This place were indeed a treasury for thee, if thou wert truly a noble jeweler. But, gentle sir, if thou must wilfully lose thy joy for a mere gem that was dear, methinks thou art given over to mad intent, and troublest thyself about a trifle. What thou hast lost was only a rose that flowered and faded according to its kind; but now by nature of the chest that secur-eth it, it proveth a pearl of price. If thou hast called thy good fortune a thief, which manifestly hath made for thee something out of thy nothing, then dost thou reproach

the very remedy of thine ill; thou art no grateful jeweler.'

A very jewel was then this visitant to me, and jewels were her gentle words.

'Indeed,' said I, 'my dear, blest child, now dost thou unravel all my woe. I beseech thee, pardon me, for I thought my Pearl was gone forth from life. But, now that I have found it, I shall make merry, and dwell with it in woodlands sheen, praising my Lord and his ways, who hath brought me hither near unto such bliss. Now, were I only at your side, beyond this water, so indeed were my joy complete!'

Then answered this pure gem: 'Ah, jeweler! Why must thou, and all men, be for ever mad? Three words in a breath hast thou spoken, and all three of them ill-considered; thou knowest not in the least what one of them does mean, and thy tongue doth



outrun thy wit. Thou sayest that thou dost think that I dwell here in this vale, because forsooth thou canst see me here with thine own eyes; and again, thou sayest that in this country thou art to dwell with me, yea, in this very place; and again, that thou shalt pass over this water unhindered—a thing that no man may lightly do. I hold him undeserving who believes only what he sees with his eyes; and he indeed is much to blame, and wants true courtesy, who thinks our Lord falsely uttered his loyal promise to raise you up unto life, albeit fate hath committed your body unto death. Ye men turn his words all awry, and believe nothing unless ye see it; it is a trait of pride ill-becoming every good man, to believe no tale trustworthy unless his own poor reason can prove it so. Rather judge for thyself whether thou hast spoken wisely, considering what

words man ought to offer God. Thou sayest thou art to dwell in this domain. Methinks it first behooves thee to ask leave; yet withal thou mightest fail to gain it. Thou desirest to cross this stream, but, ere that, thou must change thy purpose; thy body shall first sink all cold into the ground, since it was forfeit in the garden of Paradise, in the ill-keeping of our father Adam. Through dreary death must each man be brought, ere God will appoint him to cross this stream.'

'Alas, then,' said I, 'if thou dost condemn me to sorrow again, my sweet, I shall pine away. Now that I have found what I had lost, must I forego it again, even until I die? Why must I find it, if only to lose it straight-way? My precious Pearl doth me great pain! What profiteth treasure but to make a man weep, if forthwith he must lose it with bitter pangs? Nay, then, I care not whether I re-

turn to earth, nor how far thence I am banished, if I am to have no part in my Pearl. Ah, what may man expect on earth but unceasing sorrow !'

Then said the maiden : ' So thou lookest for naught but agony of grief ? Why dost thou so ? By the clamor of his grief at trifling losses, many a man oft foregoes the greater benefits. It behooves thee better to look after thine own welfare, and ever to praise God, come weal, come woe ; for resentment profiteth thee not a straw. Let him who must needs endure be not so impatient. For though thou plunge like a wild doe, and toss thy limbs about in frenzy, and utter thy rage in shrieks, yet, when thou canst make way no farther, to or fro, then must thou still abide what he shall decree. The Lord shall ordain and dispose all things, for he will never turn one foot aside from the way.

Though thou in thy sorrow be never glad again, it availeth thee naught. Have done, then, with thy strife, cease to contend, and seek his compassion with all speed; haply thy prayer will lay hold on his pity, and mercy will then show thee her power; his comfort may soothe thy suffering, and drive thy lowering looks lightly away. For, in failure or in fortune, in grief remembered or forgotten, all things abide in him to decree and ordain.'

Then said I to the maiden: 'O let not my Lord be angry, though in my haste I rave, and rush headlong in my talk! My heart was all stricken and melted with my loss, like water welling up and running forth from a spring. But now I give myself up unto his tender mercy. Chide me no longer with thy dreadful words, my dearly beloved, though

I speak idly, but tender me lovingly thy comfort, thinking in pity of this — that thou hast made reconciliation between me and care — thou who wast erstwhile the root of all my joy. My joy, and my grief too, hast thou been, wherefore so much the louder was my lament. For after thou wast withdrawn from every danger of earthly life, I knew not whither my Pearl was gone; and now that I see it again, my trouble has ceased. If, when we parted, we were of one mind, God forbid that we be at odds now, since we meet so seldom by stock or stone. And though you speak on full courteously, I am but dust, and undone with sin. But the mercy of Christ and Mary and John — these shall be the root of all my joy.

‘I behold thee now entered into the life of bliss, while I am all dejected and downcast. Perhaps of this you take little heed, or of the

burning wrongs that often fall to my lot. But now that I am here in your very presence, I would cease from dispute, and beseech you to tell me willingly and earnestly what sort of life ye lead early and late. For I am full glad that your estate is indeed changed to one of worship and good fortune; it is the high-road of all my joy, the root of all my peace.'

'Now joy betide thee, sir,' then said she so fair of face and form; 'and welcome here both to rest and roam, for now are thy words precious to me. Masterful heart and overweening pride, I assure thee, are bitterly hated here; yet my Lord loveth not to chide in anger, for meek are all they that dwell near him. And when thou shalt appear in his holy place, be thou deep-devout in all humility; for my Lord the Lamb still loveth such demeanor, and he is the root of all my joy.

‘A joyous life I lead, thou sayest true, and wouldst learn the station thereof. Thou knowest well that when thy Pearl fell away from thee I was yet very young and of tender years. Yet my Lord the Lamb by his divine nature took me in marriage, and crowned me his queen, to dwell in bliss throughout the length of all days to come. Moreover I am his love, established in his full heritage, and am his and his alone. His worth, his excellence, his high lineage, are root and ground of all my joy.’

‘Ah blessed,’ said I, ‘if this be true, be not angry, though the question I ask thee be foolish and wrong. Art thou that queen of blue heaven to whom all this world shall do honor? We believe in Mary, Author of Grace, who in maiden innocence bore a child. What queen could take away her crown from her, unless she passed her in good-

liness? Nay, for that her sweetness is beyond all compare, we call her Phœnix of Araby, that bird of blameless fashion, like the Queen of Courtesy.'

Then knelt the radiant one upon the ground, and covered her face with the folds of her garment, and prayed, saying: 'Hail gracious Queen peerless Mother, all-glorious Maiden, blessed Well-spring of every grace!'

Then she arose, and paused, and, after a space, said to me: 'Sir, many there are who gain possessions here, and hold them fast, but usurpers are there none in this place; the Empress Mary holdeth all heaven and earth and hell in her dominion, yet no one doth she drive forth from his heritage, for she is the Queen of Courtesy. The court of the kingdom of the ever-living God hath of its very essence this property: each one that entereth therein is king or queen of the whole



realm, nor shall any other dispossess such an one, but each rejoiceth in the other's possession, and would that her comrade's crown were fivefold as rich, if such increase were possible. But my Lady, of whom Jesus was born, beareth rule full high above us all; yet that offendeth none of our company, for she is the Queen of Courtesy. By the Spirit of true courtesy, saith Saint Paul, we are all members of Jesus Christ; as head, and leg, and arm, and nail, are all attached to their proper body, faithful and true, so in like manner is every Christian soul a proper limb of the Master of Might. Therefore see whether rancor or bitterness is fixed or seated between thy members; thy head harboreth not anger and resentment, though arm or finger wear a ring; and with like courtesy do we all bear ourselves in love and joy towards king and queen among us.'

‘Yea,’ said I, ‘I believe that courtesy and all charitableness prevail among you ; but, lest my words grieve you. . . . [If] thou exaltest thyself to heaven to become a queen — thou who wert so young — what greater honor can he achieve who has continued faithful and strong in the world, and lived in lifelong penance to purchase heavenly bliss with torment of the flesh? What greater worship could such an one attain than to be crowned a king by courtesy? This courtesy of which you speak is too large of deed, if that be true which thou hast said. Thou livedst not two years among our folk on earth. Thou never knewest then how to please God by deed or prayer, by Pater Noster or Creed. And crowned a queen on the first day after ! God help me, but I cannot believe that he would turn aside so far from the right. Indeed, dear maiden, the es-

tate of a countess you might fairly hold in heaven, or at least of a lady of less array; but a queen—nay, that is too much!’

Then said to me that adorable one: ‘Of his goodness there is no end. For all is justice which he ordereth, and he can do naught but right, as saith Saint Matthew in the Mass, in the true Gospel of Almighty God. In a parable he frameth an image true and exact, and likens it to bright heaven. “My kingdom on high,” he saith, “is like unto a lord who had a vineyard. The end of the year was at hand, and it was hard upon the time to prepare the vineyard for winter. Now all laborers know full well that time of year. The lord rose early to hire laborers into his vineyard, and among them found some suited to his purpose. They enter into agreement for a penny a day, and go forth, and bend to their work, and travail sore;

they prune, and bind, and make everything snug.

““About the third hour the lord goeth into the market, and findeth idle men standing there, and saith unto them: ‘Why stand ye idle? Know ye not that this day must end?’”

““And they answered with one accord, murmuring: ‘Ere the dawn came we hither, here have we stood since the sun rose, and yet no man hath commanded us to work.’”

““‘Go into my vineyard, and do what ye can,’ said the lord, and made good his command, saying, ‘Whatsoever reasonable hire be earned by nightfall I will pay you in good faith.’”

““They went into his vineyard and wrought, and all day the lord went his way, bringing new men thither. At length this

long-awaited day of toil was far spent. The time of evensong was come, an hour before sunset, and still he found strong men yet idle; and he said to them gravely: 'Why stand ye idle this whole day long?'

““They said that wages nowhere awaited their toil.

“““Then go into my vineyard, young yeomen; there labor and do what ye can.’

“““Soon all the world grew brown and dark; the sun had gone down and it waxed late. Then bade he summon the workmen, for the day was past. The lord was mindful of the eventide, and called to his reeve, saying: ‘Sirrah, now pay the servants; give them the wages I owe them. And further, that none may complain, set them all in a row, and give to all alike a penny. Begin with the last and lowest, until thou come to the first.’

““Then the first began to murmur, and say that they had travailed sore. ‘These,’ said they, ‘toiled but an hour; it seems right, then, that we should receive more. We think that we who have borne the heat of the day have done greater service than those who wrought not even two hours, and yet thou dost make them equal unto us.’

““Then said the lord to one of them: ‘Friend, I would not have thee lose aught by me. Take what is thine, and go thy way. If I hired thee at a penny for the whole day’s work, why dost thou begin now to complain? Was not thy covenant made for a penny? Thou mayest plead for nothing beyond the covenant. Then why wilt thou ask for more? Is it not my lawful privilege to do whatsoever I will with mine own? Else is thine eye bent on evil, but I am good and defraud no man.’”

‘And Christ saith: “So will I appoint each man his portion—he that is last shall be the first to enter, and the first shall be last, be he never so swift of foot. Many are called, though few be chosen unto the high places. Thus each poor man beareth away his just portion, though he hath come late, and is of low degree.” And, though his labor cease with little done, yet far more than his labor availeth the mercy of God. Wherefore I have here more joy and bliss and ladyship and abundance of life than all men in the world could win, if they sought payment according to their works. Yet I have hardly begun my labor, and it was already eventide when I entered into the vineyard; nevertheless my Lord at once took thought of my hire, and I was forthwith paid in full. But there were others who had labored longer, who toiled and sweat long ere I began, but

who have not yet got a tithe of their hire, nor will they perhaps for a year to come.’<sup>1</sup>

Then in all frankness I said: ‘To me thy tale seems unreasonable. God’s justice is ever ready and alert, else Holy Writ is but a fable. In the Psalter is a versicle that clearly and openly declareth this truth: “Thou renderest to every man according to his desert, O high and all-disposing King.” But if thou, my child, come to thy reward before him who abode steadfast the whole day long, then he who hath done the less work may win the greater reward, which means that the less work a man does, the greater his pay.’<sup>2</sup>

Then answered that gentle one: ‘Of less and more in God’s kingdom there is no

<sup>1</sup> That is, who are older than I, and are still living on earth.

<sup>2</sup> A *reductio ad absurdum*, showing the poet’s scholastic training.



hazard, for there every man is paid alike, whether little or much seem his reward. Our gentle Liege is no churl. Whether his dealings be harsh or tender, he poureth out gifts as lavishly as water runs from a moat, or streams from a deep and never-failing pool. Large is that man's exemption who hath ever continued in fear before him that giveth succor in the hour of temptation and sin; no joy shall be withheld from such an one, for the grace of God is sufficient thereunto.

‘But now thou wilt checkmate me by urging that I have here received my penny unjustly. Thou sayest that I am come too late, and am not worthy of so great a reward. Where hast thou ever known a man who abode at all times so holy in his prayer, that he forfeited not in some way, at some time, the guerdon of bright heaven? And still the

older such men grew, the oftener did they forsake the right, and do wrong. Then are mercy and grace become their only guides, for the grace of God is sufficient thereunto. But grace enough, without works, have the innocent. As soon as they are born, they descend at once into the water of baptism, and then are led into the vineyard. Anon the day, shot through with darkness, boweth before the power of Death. The gentle Lord then payeth his laborers who did no wrong ere they went forth from his vineyard. Long have they abode there, and done his bidding; why should he not give them their labor's due, and grant them their pay in the very hour of their passing? For his grace is sufficient thereunto. We know full well that all mankind was first fashioned for a life of perfect bliss, but our forefather forfeited it by the apple of which he ate, and in that eating

we were condemned to die in wretchedness and banishment from bliss, and at length to pass into the heat of hell, there to abide without respite. But straightway there interposed a healing remedy, for in that plight fair streams of blood and water ran plenteously down the rough cross, and God's grace was sufficient. Abounding rose the tide of blood and water from out the well of that great wound ; the blood redeemed us from the bale of hell, and delivered us from the second death ; and truly the water which followed the sword with cruel edge is baptism, and washeth away the fell guilt that Adam brought upon us when he drowned us in death. Now between us and bliss there is no barrier in the round world which he hath not withdrawn, and no access thereunto which he hath not restored in blessed hour ; whereunto God's grace is sufficient. He who

hath sinned again may find grace enough, if he truly repent, but he must crave such grace with sorrow and contrition, and suffer the penalty that goeth with true remorse. But he that is wholly innocent shall be saved by the justice of God that never can err. It was never God's decree that the guiltless should perish. The guilty man may indeed attain contrition, and through mercy be brought speedily unto grace; but he who never turned aside unto wickedness, and is in all things innocent—he is justly saved.

‘This one thing in truth I know of this matter—it is meet and right that both orders of men be saved: the penitent-righteous man shall see his face, and the innocent also shall come unto him. Thus saith the Psalter in one place: “Lord, who shall ascend into thy high hill, or stand in thy holy place?” Nor is God slow to answer: “He that work-

eth not evil with his hands, that is both pure and clean of heart, there shall his foot be established for ever." In justice shall the innocent be saved.

'But the righteous penitent shall also draw near unto that fair mansion—he that taketh not his life in vain, nor flattereth his neighbor deceitfully. Of the man who is thus righteous Solomon speaketh plainly, declaring how gently our King received him, and led his feet in the ways that are straight, and showed him the kingdom of God for a little space, as who would say: "Lo yon fair realm! Thou mayest win it for thine own, if thou be brave." But without fear or danger of falsehood I say, in justice ever shall the innocent be saved.

'Of righteous men speaketh yet another—David in the Psalter, if haply ye have seen his words: "Lord, draw not thy servant

unto judgment, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.” Wherefore, when thou shalt come before that bar where all our causes shall be tried, urge in thy defense thy right of being received by these very words that I have cited. But he that died the bloody death on the cross, with hands grievously pierced, grant that, when thou come to trial, thou be acquitted by innocence, and not by pleading.

‘Let him who can read aright consider the Holy Book, and learn how Jesus walked among people of old, and how men eagerly brought their little ones unto him. With fair words they besought him to touch their children for the health and happiness that went forth from him. Impatiently his disciples charged them to let him be, and many were kept back with their chiding. Then Jesus said sweetly: “Nay, suffer the children to

come unto me, since for such is prepared the Kingdom of Heaven." Thus ever in justice shall the innocent be saved. Then Jesus called unto him a gentle child, and said no man could win his kingdom unless he should come thither as such an one; else let him never enter therein. Innocent, true, undefiled, without spot or stain of polluting sin — when such knock at the door, quickly shall the bolt be drawn. Therein is bliss that shall never end — such as the merchant sought among goodly pearls, when he sold all that he had, both wool and linen, to buy himself a pearl without spot. "This spotless pearl which the merchant bought with a great price — nay, with all his goods — is like unto the Kingdom of bright Heaven" — so spake the Father of earth and sea; for it is stainless pure and bright, and one perfect round, and glad of heart, and common

to all the righteous. Lo, even in the centre of my breast it abideth! My Lord, the Lamb, who spent his blood, hath put it there in token of peace. I rede thee, forsake the mad world, and get for thyself this spotless pearl.'

'Ah Pearl so pure,' said I, 'arrayed in fair pearls, wearing the pearl of great price, who fashioned thy fair figure? Full skilful was he that wrought thy vesture. Thy beauty is not the mere gift of Nature; from Pygmalion came not thy bright color, nor did Aristotle in all his books describe the true quality of these thy attributes. Thy color passes the fleur-de-lis; thy demeanor as of angels is so pure and gracious—ah, tell me, bright creature, what station is held by Pearl so rare?'

Then said she: 'My Lamb without blemish, who excelleth all others, he, my



dear Destiny, chose me for his mate, unworthy as I was; a fitting time was set for that union—the day when I departed from your world of tears. He called me to share his gentle condition, saying: “Come unto me, my sweet love, for in thee is neither spot nor stain.” Then he clothed me in strength and beauty, and washed my robes in his blood, setting me in the place of honor, and crowned me in pure virginity, and arrayed me in spotless pearls.’

‘Nay,’ said I, ‘thou spotless bride flaming with light, clothed in royalty so rich and free, of what nature is the Lamb that he would take thee to his wife? Hast thou in truth mounted so high above all the rest to live with him a life of such ladyship? So many a fair one there is, the world over, that hath endured long struggle for Christ; and if thou didst thrust out all those dear ones,

and put down all others from that marriage, save only thyself so strong and firm, then art thou not immaculate only, but matchless.’

Then said that lovely queen: ‘Immaculate, unblemished, and unspotted am I indeed, and so may I aver in all seemliness; but I said not “matchless queen.” We in bliss are brides of the Lamb—one hundred and forty [and four] thousand in all, as it is written in the Apocalypse. Saint John saw them all in a company on the Mount of Sion, that fair height; the Apostle beheld them in ghostly vision arrayed unto the marriage, upon that hill which is the new city of Jerusalem. Of this Jerusalem I now come to speak. If thou wilt know his true nature—my Lamb, my Lord, my precious Jewel, my Joy, my Bliss, my fair Loved One—hear what the prophet Isaiah spake

of him, in pity at his sweet submission: “This glorious Innocent that was slain of men, without taint of sin, was brought as a sheep to the slaughter; and, as a lamb which the shearer taketh in the field, so closed he his mouth at every question, when the Jews tried him in Jerusalem.”

‘In Jerusalem was my Love slain and torn by shameless ruffians. Full willing was he to bear our sorrows, and he hath taken upon himself our bitter griefs. With buffets was his face all flayed, that had been so fair to look upon. For our sin he set himself at naught—he who had no sin that he could call his own. For us he suffered himself to be flayed, and bowed down, and stretched upon the brutal cross, as meek as a lamb that uttereth no plaint. For us he died in Jerusalem. And when the good Saint John was baptizing at Jerusalem, in Jordan, and

in Galilee, his words accorded with Isaiah ; for when Jesus drew near unto him he spake of him this prophecy : “ Behold the Lamb of God, unchanging as the rock, that taketh away the burden of sins which all men have heaped upon themselves. As for him, not one hath he wrought, yet upon himself he hath taken them all. Who shall declare his generation that died for us in Jerusalem ? ”

‘ Thus at Jerusalem, by true witness of either prophet, my sweet Loved One was twice likened to a Lamb in lowliness of mind and manner. The third time also is duly set down full clear in the Apocalypse. In the midst of the throne, where the saints were sitting, the Apostle John beheld him all unveiled, opening the book with great square leaves, where the seven seals were set in order ; and at that sight every creature in

heaven,<sup>1</sup> in earth, and in hell, trembled with fear. This Lamb of Jerusalem was without sin or blemish; his only hue was shining white, admitting neither spot nor stain, and he was clothed in white wool rich and flowing.

‘Wherefore each soul that never knew the taint of sin is an adorable wife unto the Lamb. And though each day he fetcheth hither a great number, yet there entereth among us no rivalry nor strife, except that we would that each one of our comrades were five; the more the merrier, by the blessing of God. Our love is one that doth thrive in a great company, where honor grows from more to more. Decrease of joy can no one bring upon us who wear this pearl upon our breasts, for they that bear the device of

<sup>1</sup> The poet says ‘Jerusalem,’ that is, the New Jerusalem or heaven; see Rev. 5.13.

spotless pearls can utter no impure thing. Though our bodies shrivel among clods of clay, and though ye without rest cry out for sorrow, yet we have perfect knowledge in all things. Our dread of the bodily death hath been realized; the Lamb now maketh us to rejoice, our care is done away, he ever filleth our hearts with mirth at the heavenly mass, each one's joy is perfect to the uttermost, and no one's honor shall ever grow less.

'But lest thou find my tale unseemly, thus is it written in a place in the Apocalypse: "I saw," saith John, "the Lamb standing on Mount Sion in the fullness of his strength, and with him were one hundred and forty and four thousand virgins. And in their foreheads I beheld written the name of the Lamb, and of his Father. And I heard then a voice from heaven like the

voice of many waters rushing in a mighty torrent; and, as thunder leaps among the darkened tors, such, I ween, was this sound of mingled voices. And though the sound was sharp and loud, yet could I hear them singing a melody new and strange, and deliciously sweet it was to hearken thereto. As the voice of harpers harping with their harps, full clear was the new song that they sang; a sweet discourse of sounding notes it was, as they took up the strains, singing together in pure concert. Right before the throne of God, and the four beasts that bow down unto him, and the elders so grave of mien, they sang their song unceasingly. Yet there was never a man of such skill, for all the arts that he ever knew, that could sing one note of that song, except this company that followeth the Lamb. For they are redeemed and far removed from the

earth, being the first fruits appointed unto the gentle Lamb, and like unto him in the light of their countenances; since naught that they have suffered hath defiled their tongues with falsehood or deceit." Nor can that pure company be removed from its immaculate Lord even for ever.'

Then said I: 'Bear with my inquiry yet a little while. Though I confront thee with many questions, I ought not to tempt thy true understanding who art elect unto Christ's bridechamber. I am the while but dust and muck, and thou a rose all fresh and fair, dwelling here by this blessed hill where the joy of life is unfailing. Yet, gracious maiden, in whom simplicity abideth, I would expressly ask of thee one thing; and, though I be as hasty as fire, nevertheless let my prayer avail; bold and sincere is my appeal, if haply thou seest a way to grant



what I ask ; and, as thou art filled with glory and free from corruption, withhold not this boon from me in my sorrow. Have ye no dwellings enclosed in castle-walls, no manor where ye may assemble and live together? Thou tellest me of Jerusalem rich and royal, where David, the beloved one, was upon his throne; yet not among these woods may that fair city stand, but in Judea. And since ye are in all things pure, so must your dwelling-places be likewise without taint. This spotless company of which thou hast spoken, this throng of thousands, is so vast a multitude, that ye must needs possess a large city, for great is your number. Evil it were if so fair a crowd of bright jewels must lodge without its walls. If I see no building hereabouts, as I tarry among these hills, then I think ye must dwell alone and apart, as ye gaze upon the glory of this lovely

stream. But if elsewhere thou hast strong mansions, bring me now to that bright citadel.'

Then said this rare creature unto me: 'That city of Judea that thou hast in mind is the city that the Lamb did seek wherein to suffer for man's sake. It is the old Jerusalem, for there the old guilt was done away. But the new city that hath come down to us of God's own sending—that is the theme of the Apostle in the Apocalypse. The Lamb, pure from every defiling spot, hath conveyed thither his fair company. And, as his flock needeth not earthly pinfold, so his city is without confine of earthly moat. To speak exactly of these two cities, if both are alike called Jerusalem, that name should mean to you no more than City of God, or Vision of Peace. In the one our peace was made perfect, for there the Lamb chose

to suffer in penal agony for us. In the other, peace, and peace alone, is to be found, which shall endure unbroken for ever. That is the city to which we press forward from the day that our flesh is laid down to decay. There shall glory and bliss increase ever for the company of them that are without stain.'

Then said I to that lovely flower: 'Ah, maiden pure, so meek and mild, bring me now to that pleasant abode.'

But she, so radiant, replied: 'Nay, for God will not suffer it. Thou mayest not enter into his stronghold; but from the Lamb, through his great loving-kindness, I have won for thee a glimpse thereof. Thou mayest behold that fair enclosure from without, but not one foot within its walls mayest thou go. Nay, thou couldst not walk in its streets, unless thou wert wholly pure. If I am

to reveal to thee this city, take now thy way up toward this river's head, and I shall follow along with thee on this side, till thou gain a certain hill.'

Then would I tarry no longer, but stole away among leafy, pleasant boughs, till I spied a hill, and, as I hurried on, looked out upon the city beyond the river, revealed at a distance, shining with rays brighter than the sun. In the Apocalypse is shown its fashion, as there described by John the Apostle. And as John beheld it with his own eyes, in like manner saw I that city of renown—Jerusalem so new, so royally arrayed, as it was descended out of heaven.

The city was all of fine gold, bright, burnished, and radiant, like clear shining glass, and garnished beneath with precious gems. In twelve steps up from the lowest base rose

twelve foundations of rich jointure, and each tier was a separate stone. Thus splendidly doth John the Apostle describe this very city in the book of his Vision. As he there doth name these stones, so knew I their names after his tale: jasper was the name of the first that I discerned on the first stage; it shone all green along the lowest course; sapphire filled the second step; then chalcedony without blemish shone pure and pale in the third; the fourth was emerald all green; the fifth, sardonyx; then the ruby hath the Apostle named sixth in order. Thereto he added the chrysolite as the seventh in the foundation; and the eighth, beryl, clear and white; the ninth, topaz of twofold hue inlaid; tenth in order, the chrysoprase; the eleventh is the precious jacinth; the twelfth, the most precious of all, is the purple amethyst blent with inde.

Above these courses overhung the wall of jasper clear as glass; I knew it by John's story in the Apocalypse.

Still more did I see, as he hath set it forth. These twelve steps were broad yet steep, and above them stood the city, a perfect square—in length, breadth, and height, all fair and equal. The streets of gold were as transparent glass; the jasper walls gleamed like amber; the houses within were adorned with all kinds of precious stones that could be brought together. And each side of this city stretched the space of twelve furlongs ere it ended, in height, and length, and breadth, just equal, for the Apostle saw it measured.

Yet more did I see of what John hath written. Each side of the city had three gates, and thus I beheld twelve in order, the portals o'erlaid with rich plates; and each

gate of a single margery-pearl that fadeth never. Each one bore a name in writing, which are the names of the children of Israel in the order of their birth, beginning with oldest.

Such light shone in all the streets that they had no need of the sun, neither of the moon. Sun nor moon wanted they; for surely the very God was their bright lamp, and the Lamb was their lantern, and through him the whole city was filled with brightness. Over wall and dwelling ran my eyes, for air so subtle and clear could bar no light. The high throne one might there behold surrounded with all the array declared in the words of John; and the high God himself was seated thereon. Forth out of the throne there ran a river brighter than sun or moon. Neither of these ever shone with light so sweet as did that abounding flood, where it

gushed forth from the ground. Swift did it run on through every street, without any mingling of filth, or pollution, or slime. Church, nor chapel, nor temple was ever set in that place, but the Almighty was their proper sanctuary, in which is still made anew the sacrifice of the Lamb. The gates of the city were never shut, but stood always open toward every quarter. Therein entereth none to take refuge who beareth any taint whatsoever. The moon could never share that glory; too spotty is her globe, too grim her favor; and since there is no night there, what need that the moon climb thither in her course, or try to equal that supernal light that shineth upon the river's brink? The planets are in too poor a plight, and the very sun himself is far too dim. On either side of the water are trees all bright that bear the twelve fruits of life full early; and twelve



times a year do they bring forth in their vigor, and renew their fruit each month.

No heart of mortal man beneath the moon could endure so great a marvel as I beheld when I gazed upon that city, so wondrous was its fashion. I stood as still as a frightened quail at that strange and radiant apparition; of neither rest nor travail was I aware, so ravished was I with its pure gleam. For I dare say in all surety that, if one in the body had met that boon, though all the learned men in the world had him in cure, his life had been lost for ever.

And as the moon doth rise in mighty splendor, ere the last day-gleam hath sunk with the sun, so in wondrous manner I was suddenly aware of a procession. This noble city of glory and splendor was presently filled with virgins all unsummoned, in the same guise as was my blessed one that wore

the crown; so crowned were they all alike and appareled in pearls and robes of white; and in each one's breast fair bound was the blessed pearl in great beauty. Joyfully they walked together on the golden streets that shone as glass; hundreds of thousands I thought there were, and all alike in their liveries. Hard was it to find the gladdest face among them. Before them walked the Lamb in state, having seven horns of bright red gold; like pearls of great price was his raiment. Toward the throne they took their way. And, though great was their number, there was no crowding among them, but mild as gentle maidens at mass, so walked they forth in perfect joy.

The joy that awoke at the Lamb's forthcoming was too great to tell. The elders, as he drew near, fell prostrate at his feet. Legions of angels, assembled there, scattered

incense of sweet savor. Then the sounds of praise and joy burst forth anew: all sang together in honor of that bright Jewel; and the sound of voices which the angels of heaven then uttered in their joy could have struck down through earth into hell. Then in sooth I conceived a great and glad desire to praise the Lamb there in the midst of his train, and delight filled my heart to tell of him and his marvelous guise. Best was he, and blithest, and worthiest of all that ever I heard praised—so adorably white his raiment, so simple his look, himself so gentle. But a wound full wide and wet with blood appeared close against his heart, torn through his skin; and from his fair side gushed his blood. Alas! thought I, who wrought that mischief? What heart that grief would not have burnt out, ere it had found delight therein? Yet could no one

doubt the Lamb's joy. For though he was hurt and wounded, it appeared not in his countenance, so full of light and gladness and glory were his eyes.

I looked among his bright company, and saw how abounding and filled they were with eternal life. Then I found there my little queen that I thought had stood near me in the valley. Ah God, with many a sweet sound did she make merry, so white among her peers! The sight of her made me think in my ecstasy of wading the stream for my love's desire. Delight filled eye and ear, and my mortal mind dissolved in madness. When I saw my wondrous child, I yearned to be there with her, though she was withheld from me beyond the water. I thought nothing could hurt me by striking me a blow and laming me. If no one could prevent my plunging into the stream, I hoped to

swim the interval in safety, though I should die for it at last.

But from that sudden purpose I was shaken, for when in my perversity, I would have started forward into the water, back was I called from my intent—it was not my Prince's will. It pleased him not that I rushed headlong over these wondrous marches in so mad a plight. Though I was rash and rude in my haste, yet quickly was I stayed therein; for, as I hurried to the brink, the start roused me from my dream.

Then I awoke in that pleasant arbor, and my head was still laid upon the very hillock where my Pearl had slipped from me into the ground. And, as I stretched myself, I became dazed with a great fear; and anon with a deep sigh I said: 'Now let all things be according to the Prince's pleasure.' I was ill pleased to be thrust out so suddenly from

that beauteous region, with all its sights vivid and fair; a heavy longing struck me down into a swoon; and thereafter I cried out ruefully: 'O Pearl of rich renown, dear to me is all that thou hast told in this true vision. If it be a right and true report that thou farest thus in a bright garland, then it is well with me also here in this dungeon of sorrow to know that thou art dwelling in the Prince's favor.'

Had I always yielded to the Prince's pleasure, and yearned for no more than was given me, and kept myself in true intent as the Pearl besought me, she that is now so happy—had I been rather drawn to God's presence than forced my way—then into more of his mysteries I should have been led. But a man would always seize greater fortune than rightfully belongeth to him.

Wherefore my joy was soon torn asunder, and I was cast out from that country that endureth for ever. Ah God, mad are they that strive against thee, or try to resist thy will!

To please the Prince and be at peace with him is full easy for the good Christian. I have found him, day and night, a God, a Lord, a true Friend. Such as I have now told was the fortune that befell me at this mound, bowed in grief for my Pearl; and straightway I gave her up unto God in Christ's dear blessing and mine own—he whom in the form of bread and wine the priest showeth unto us each day. And now may Christ our Prince grant that we become servants of his own household, and precious pearls to delight him ever. Amen.

The Riverside Press  
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS  
U · S · A